Roles of Health Impact Assessment and the Potash Mining Project, Thailand

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Topics

• The Udon Thani Potash Concession
• Local Opposition
• The Faulty EIA of the Project
• APPC fought back
• Changing Thailand’s Minerals Act
• The Roles of Health Impact Assessment
• Lessons Learned and Future Development
The Udon Thani Potash Concession

- world-class potash resource
- high-grade, shallow depth
- one of the lowest-cost producers in the industry
- 2,500 hectares
- 225 million tonnes of sylvanite
The Udon Thani Potash Concession (cont.)

- Asia Pacific Potash Corporation (APPC) --> concession for exploration
- 90% of APPC owned by Asia Pacific Resources Ltd (APR)
- APR owned by Crew (Vancouver) and Bechtel (USA)
The Udon Thani Potash Concession (cont.)

- 2.0 millions tones of potash per year
- expected to have 25-30 year life production
- total 500 - 600 millions tones
- expected revenue -> US$ 70,000 m.
APPCC will mine a total area of 2,500 ha beneath residential areas, farmland, a national highway and railway and military installations.
The mine will locate 350 m. below the surface (~ one-third depth of the major potash mines in Canada)

- 5 millions potash wastes.
- 22 years to carry back into underground.
Current status

- the company has not received mining lease under the current Minerals Act of Thailand.
Local Opposition

• Local communities fear widespread subsidence and salt contamination.

• In 1993, the first individual protests occurred during the APPC exploration survey.

• Currently over 1,000 people in 21 villages within concession area are protesters.
Community Conflict (cont.)

• lack of public consultation about the basic project plans

• In 2001 Udon Thani Environmental Conservation Group have been established.

• The group has disseminated information about the project and its potential impacts by seminars and meetings.
• The salt waste is the primary concern.
• 20 millions tones will be stored at the surface in a 40m high tailings pile that is to remain uncovered and exposed to wind and rainfall.
• Pitfalls in the EIA report and unfair agreement in the mining contract were the major arguments.

• The Minister set up a committee of environmental experts to re-evaluate the EIA report previously approved by the concerned authority.
APPC fought back

- Several local influential businessmen are being awarded construction contracts.
- The company returned gathering supports for the mine from other villages.
- People in the mining areas were separated into two opposite sides.
Changing Thailand’s Minerals Act

• Thailand’s Minerals Act did not provide conditions for the approval of underground mining.
• APPC first seek permission for the mine to be operated underground.
• Since 1997, Department Mineral Resources has at least five times submitted a Bill to the cabinet to amend the Minerals Resources Act.
Changing Thailand’s Minerals Act (cont.)

- The amendment would provide APPC with favorable permitting conditions for its proposed mine.
- The Bill was rejected each time for its unconstitutional and unsatisfactory in terms of public participation and the protection of private property rights.
Changing Thailand’s Minerals Act (cont.)

- The joint House-Senate committee has made significant amendments.
  - greater public participation
  - protection of property rights
  - funding for independent EIA, SIA, HIA etc.

- But allow the underground mining below > 50 m. underground!
The Roles of HIA

• HIA in Thailand is quite new, but it has been gaining more and more public interests.

• Since 2000, Reviews of international experiences and pilot HIA projected have been commissioned by the Health Systems Research Institute.

• Networks of HIA research groups were organized.
The HIA working group has joined the Udon Thani working group to organized a two-day public seminar on “Potash Mining Project and the Application of Health Impact Assessment Process in Thailand” on 17-18 May 2003, in Udon Thani.

~500 participants from various groups including the APPC company staff
The seminar issues & processes

• Recent project progress and stakeholders’ concerned
• Development, concepts, principles and procedures of HIA.
• Proposed HIA model for the Udon Thani potash mining project by the HIA working group based on the framework of the 9 groups of health determinants developed by the Canadian Environmental Health (Kwiatkowski, 2002).
The seminar processes (cont.)

- A video presentation of previous piloted HIA project
- Small-group brainstorming sessions to listen to voices of health concerns among participants.
- Press conference, announced the results of the seminar and urging the needs for a comprehensive HIA by independent agency.
Issues Raised

• Serious concern has been expressed regarding the potential social and health impacts of the mining project.

• The lack of health risk assessment and no public safety nets in EIA statement.

• Neither health monitoring process nor risk elimination is planned.
The Roles of HIA (cont.)

- The comprehensive HIA study commenced in July 2003 by stakeholders.
- The HIA report will be submitted to the government as supplementary information for it to make decisions regarding the project's future.
- It will be the first time the government will have a health impact study as a guideline for making a decision on a project.
• On 3 June 2003, the committee of experts in environment reconsidering the EIA report has concluded that the EIA report has a numbers of major mistakes and was not suitable for the permission process.
Lessons Learned

• Udon Thani potash mining project is an extremely large project, it faces increasing problems.

• HIA has been used to promote agreement and understanding as well as to disseminate information about the project to the public and the media.
Lessons Learned

• Involvement of all stakeholders are essential.

• Listening, encouraging open discussion and keeping everyone focused on the present situation – not only the negative impact but also the positive side – are some of the best ways to move everyone’s mindset openly and honestly with each other.
Future Development

• International corporation to push the international legal standards of corporate code of conduct and extraterritorial operation.
STOP! the POTASH PROJECT

Development must lie in the hands of the people!!

Now!